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Summary record of the 4th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 24 November 1999, at 9 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Gurirab (President of the General Assembly) (Namibia)
later: Mr. Ingólfsson (Vice-Chairman) (Iceland)

Contents

Adoption of the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and allocation of items (*continued*)

Request for the inclusion of an additional item submitted by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Ukraine

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The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and allocation of items

(continued)

Request for the inclusion of an additional item submitted by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Ukraine (A/54/235)

1. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to consider a request by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Ukraine for the inclusion of an additional item entitled "International recognition of the Day of Vesak", contained in document A/54/235. The representatives of Sri Lanka, India, Spain, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Bhutan had asked to address the Committee in accordance with rule 43 of the rules of procedure.

2. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. de Saram (Sri Lanka), Mr. Sharma (India), Mr. Flores (Spain), Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh), Mr. Babar (Pakistan), Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) and Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan) took places at the Committee table.*

3. **Mr. de Saram** (Sri Lanka) said that the Day of Vesak, the holiest day of the year in Buddhism, was the Day of the Full Moon in the month of May on which Buddhists commemorated the birth, achievement of enlightenment and passing of the Buddha. There were over 150 million Buddhists worldwide, predominantly in Asia but also in many other regions of the world. The Buddha's message was one of compassion and humanity that superseded national and international differences; it was a philosophy that fully reflected the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

4. The explanatory memorandum and draft resolution contained in document A/54/235 provided the background to the request. The General Assembly should recognize the Day of Vesak and allow for appropriate arrangements to be made, without cost to the United Nations, for the international observance of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices in consultation with the relevant Secretariat officials and with Permanent Missions that might wish to be consulted. He

hoped that the Committee would include the item on the agenda of the fifty-fourth session and refer it to the Assembly for consideration at a plenary meeting.

5. **Mr. Sharma** (India) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement made by the representative of Sri Lanka. The Buddha, whose teachings contained the message of universal compassion and peace, would always be a leading light to mankind, and nothing would be more appropriate than for the United Nations to commemorate his life and ideals. He therefore hoped that the Committee would accede to the request for the inclusion of the item in the agenda.

6. **Mr. Flores** (Spain) said that Spain was one of the 16 sponsors of the request for the inclusion of the additional item. The Organization's recognition of the special days celebrated by the world's various cultures and religions, including the Day of Vesak, would demonstrate its commitment to humanity's common spiritual heritage and help to promote understanding among different civilizations.

7. **Mr. Hossain** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh had strong historical ties with Buddhism and celebrated the Day of Vesak as a national holiday. The United Nations should recognize the Day of Vesak as a sacred day and observe it in an appropriate manner at Headquarters and its other offices all over the world. His delegation therefore urged the Committee to include the additional item in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

8. **Mr. Jayanama** (Thailand) said that his delegation associated itself fully with the statement made by the representative of Sri Lanka. As the world's largest predominantly Buddhist kingdom, Thailand called upon the General Committee to include the additional item in the agenda and refer it to the General Assembly for consideration in plenary meeting.

9. *Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

10. **Mr. Babar** (Pakistan) said that the holy Day of Vesak was celebrated in Asia and throughout the world by millions of people. By deciding to observe that Day, the United Nations would demonstrate its recognition of the widespread influence of Buddhism and its universal appeal. His delegation therefore hoped that the Committee would include the additional item in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

11. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that it was only right that Buddhism, one of the world's great religions, should be recognized by the United Nations

through the observance of the Day of Vesak. His delegation therefore urged the Committee to decide to include the additional item in the agenda.

12. **Mr. Pradhan** (Bhutan) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Sri Lanka and the other previous speakers. As a Buddhist kingdom, Bhutan was committed to the teachings of the Buddha, whose ideals were very similar to those of the Charter of the United Nations. His delegation hoped that the General Assembly would see fit to adopt the draft resolution contained in document A/54/235.

13. **Mr. Zackheos** (Cyprus) said the proposed additional item complemented item 34 of the agenda of the fifty-fourth session, entitled "Dialogue among civilizations". His delegation intended to become a sponsor of the draft resolution when it was considered by the General Assembly in plenary session.

14. *Mr. de Saram (Sri Lanka), Mr. Sharma (India), Mr. Flores (Spain), Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh), Mr. Babar (Pakistan), Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic) and Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan) withdrew.*

15. *The Committee decided to recommend to the General Assembly that the item should be included in the agenda, and that it should be considered directly in plenary meeting.*

The meeting rose at 9.40 a.m.